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Sermon Notes

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Christ's Call to Relentless Commitment

Mark 8:34-35

I. The Relentless Difficulty of Christ's Demand

A. The Demand Stated

Mark 8:34-35 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

B. The Relentless Difficulty of the Demand Described

One of the most awe-inspiring journeys in nature is that of the **Alaska King Salmon**

Born in some small stream, perhaps a tiny tributary of a larger stream in Alaska, a King Salmon will swim downstream to the Pacific Ocean, actually acclimating to a saltwater existence from the fresh water in which they were born. They swim as far as 2000 miles in the Pacific and Bering Seas as they reach full maturity.

In the summer of their maturity, inner instinct and earth cues guide them back not only to their parent stream, but back to the exact tributary in which they were born.

The journey upstream is an arduous one. The fish batter themselves against rocks while leaping waterfalls. A great amount of energy is expended in the swim upstream. Salmon in the Yukon River swim up to 2400 miles. Salmon stop eating once

they enter fresh water, so their bodies are steadily being depleted of fat. 90 percent of their fat reserves and 50 percent of their protein are consumed in this upstream journey.

After this astonishing journey, the King Salmon reproduce, then die within a week

Who of us has not seen incredible pictures of a King Salmon jumping UPSTREAM against the pounding whitewater of a significant waterfall in northern Alaska? Truly amazing

The King Salmon defies the overwhelming power of Alaskan whitewater every mile of its journey upstream

BUT YET it is NATURAL... all the salmon do it

In our passage today, Jesus Christ is calling His disciples to follow Him in a SUPERNATURAL journey

The Christian life is truly a supernatural life. It cannot be lived in the simple strength of human power – not physical power, not willpower, not mental power... no human power is sufficient to follow Christ for one day.

Why is this? Because Christ calls on us to **deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him** if we wish to go to heaven.

And each human being is born with a dedication to pleasing self that could best be described as FANATICAL... it is the central idolatry of the human race... we will do almost anything to please ourselves. Only good parenting teaches an infant gradually to lessen this fanatical commitment to self so that we can somehow fit into a world with almost 8 billion other people who are also naturally fanatically committed to self

The flow of the personality of a human being is an even greater force of NATURE than whitewater or gravity... it is purely NATURAL for each descendent of Adam and Eve to be fanatically devoted to self... to pursue selfish interests in every conversation, in every food choice, in every turn we make in

our cars, in every shopping choice we make at a mall, in every website we choose online, in every text we write, in every single solitary choice we make, COMMITMENT TO SELF is a more powerful force than Alaskan whitewater tumbling down a waterfall,

In today's text, Jesus Christ is calling on His disciples to swim upstream constantly against your desire to save yourself, feed yourself, please yourself, promote yourself, prefer yourself, choose yourself, coddle yourself, cherish yourself

He's actually calling on us to be willing to die for Him... to die in small and large acts of self-sacrifice; perhaps to die ultimately as a martyr if God wills

This is the supernatural life that leads to heaven

It is the LIFE CHRIST HIMSELF LIVED... and it is life He calls on us to live

It is absolutely astonishing how much Christ gave for us...

As Jesus died on the cross, as His lifeblood was poured out, as His clothes were being gambled over to fulfill prophecy, as He breathed His last... there was absolutely NOTHING HELD BACK...everything He had to give, He gave

It is also absolutely astonishing how much Christ gives TO us...
 inconceivable wealth in eternity, inconceivable wealth in a heavenly Kingdom: full forgiveness of sins for each one who believes in Him, a new heart, the indwelling Holy Spirit, adoption by the Father, protection from all of Satan's devices, a resurrection body, and an eternity in the New Heavens and New Earth... a personal place at His table, eternal fellowship with a great multitude of saints from every age of church history and from every nation on earth

Jesus GAVE EVERYTHING FOR US SO HE COULD GIVE EVERYTHING TO US

But it is just as amazing **what Jesus demands from us...** for in the same way as He gave everything for us and gives everything to us, every single day of your Christian life He has stood in front of you and demanded absolutely everything FROM you

Anything less than your very best is less than He demands

II. The Context of Christ's Demand

A. Location: Caesarea Philippi

B. Occasion: Jesus Asked them: "Who Do You Say I Am?"

Mark 8:29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

C. Peter's Confession (Matthew's fuller version)

Matthew 16:16 "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

D. Jesus' Promise to Build His Kingdom

Matthew 16:18 ... on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

E. Jesus' Warning

Mark 8:31-32 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this

F. Peter Rebukes and Is Rebuked

Mark 8:32-33 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

G. Significance

Peter's conception of the Kingdom of God is all wrong... far too human, too self-serving, too earthly and carnal

Jesus has to strip them all of their human conceptions of his kingdom... to establish that he himself has to die on the cross... and of the need his disciples have to follow him in self-denial and daily death

H. Full Statement

Mark 8:34-38 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

As Christ's disciples deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow him in obedience to his commands, Christ's kingdom will be built. Essential to that is that his disciples be willing to lose their lives in this earth to save them in eternity... they have to understand that their eternal souls are worth more than all this material world has to offer. And they have to fight the assault this God-hating world will lay on us to be ASHAMED of Christ and of his words...because only by proclaiming Christ and his words will the Kingdom of God be established.

The fullness of these themes is far too great for one sermon... so let's focus on Christ's basic, relentless, and overwhelmingly difficult call to ALL his disciples:

Mark 8:34-35 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

III. To Whom Christ Makes His Demand

A. The Crowd and His Disciples

1. Remember: Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke him privately
2. When Jesus rebuked Peter, he turned around and said it to all the apostles
3. After Jesus rebukes Peter, he summoned EVERYONE WITHIN EARSHOT to hear this demand and warning!
4. This is not a secret teaching; there must be full disclosure on this call and demand
5. Jesus wants all his disciples to COUNT THE COST

B. To Whom It is Addressed

“If ANYONE would come after me...”

To “come after me” = go where I am going

Yes, it is to kingdom glory... but they don't really understand that properly

It is ultimately to eternity in Christ's heavenly kingdom:

John 14:1-4 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

To “come after Jesus” is to go where he is going for all eternity... to go to his heavenly city and heavenly mansion and heavenly world

John 14:5-6 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So... if you want to follow where Jesus is going, if you want to be with the heavenly Father, you MUST give what he is demanding here of EVERYONE!!

IV. Understanding Christ's Demand

Three Aspects: Deny yourself... take up your cross... follow Jesus

A. Deny Yourself

1. Deny what your flesh wants you to do... what your selfishness demands of you
2. Picture the Salmon... swimming constantly upstream... against self, against the world's constant appeal to your desires
3. Our Fanatical Commitment to Self
 - a. Every single baby born on the face of the planet is born with this one thing in common: a fanatical commitment to self-interest
 - b. This we get from our first father, Adam, who turned away from God to embrace self
 - c. Every single person grows up and feels the constant pull of ONE CENTRAL QUESTION: **“What's in it for me??”**
 - d. This is OUR problem... we each feel it every single moment
 - e. It's not like genocide or rape or grand theft or premeditated murder, where we have trouble understanding how anyone could be that evil
 - f. We are well acquainted with this sin... the greatest in the world: **SELFISHNESS**
 - g. Turn away from the overwhelming and fanatical commitment you have had from infancy to do whatever you think is in your best interest
4. Killing Selfishness Every Single Moment

Richard Baxter, *The Christian Directory*: “Selfishness is the radical, positive sin of the soul, comprehending in seed form and as a primary cause all other sins...”

Selfishness is the cause of all wars, all marital squabbles, all lawsuits, all luxury and all poverty, all addictions, all parenting struggles, all church splits, all vaunting ambition... basically all trouble between human beings

Consider how sweet life would be on this planet if this one root sin could be eradicated... love of self

5. The World's Fanatical Commitment to Self

- a. Satan has woven selfishness into the worldly appeals with which he destroys human souls
- b. Reading a secular magazine, noted one ad after another appealing openly to selfishness
 - Cadillac SUV: "Seats seven comfortably, seats one ideally"
 - Another ad vacation resort: surround yourself with the luxury you deserve
 - Another ad spoke of a spa where you could shamelessly pamper yourself

We are surrounded every day by people who are driving and pushing and striving to meet their own selfish interests... who if you let them go first, will assume it's the way it should be and who look on you as weak; but if you cross them, they will look on you with withering rage

BUT NATURALLY... we are exactly like that! Apart from the grace of God in the gospel, we are every bit as selfish as any of them

6. This is exactly what Jesus tells us to deny

7. The Church's Insufficient Sanctification

- a. No eminent saints exist who have finally conquered this sin
- b. Even in church, the godliest men and women fight daily battles against selfishness

Richard Baxter: “Selfishness is the hardest sin in the world to overcome.... The persons that seem to have put sin to death the best, if you do but cross them in their self-interest or opinion, or seem to slight them or have a low esteem of them, what swellings, what heart-burnings, what bitter censurings, what proud impatience, if not schisms or separations will result.”

8. All This Adds Up to a Constant Battle... the Bitterest of Your Life

B. Take Up Your Cross

1. Willingly stoop to pick up the article of death... Carry the cross
2. Not merely theoretical or abstract to Jesus’ disciples,, they’d seen the Romans kill many people by then

Estimated that as many as 30,000 crucifixions occurred in Jesus’ lifetime

3. When Jesus told His disciples for the first time that He would die in Jerusalem, their minds perhaps pictured Him nailed to a cross
 - a. BUT when He told them they had to deny themselves and take up their crosses, their minds must have reeled
 - b. What is the cross?
 - i) Not merely some distressing burden in life, like a sore back or cancer or a difficult job or a nagging spouse or a rebellious child... non-Christians have those sufferings common to all mankind
 - ii) Many people speak of such as such as “My cross to bear”
 - iii) NO! It is specifically the suffering and persecution and opposition that will come to you as a Christian from a hate-filled world

Matthew 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

- iv) AND the practical suffering of mortifying the flesh, resisting temptations

Galatians 5:24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

To die to what you want, your dreams, aspirations, preferences, pride... your desire for approval from others, your desire for comfort and security in this world, your yearning for love and success and money and pleasure and fun and and and and and....

C. Follow Jesus

1. A life of imitating Christ... following his self-denying example
2. Especially in his death on the cross... as he willingly drank the cup the Father gave him
3. But it is all of life... imitating Christ's lifestyle of self-denying service to the Father and to suffering people

1 John 2:6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

4. Obedience is central to this

Luke 6:46 "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

D. Relentless: "Daily"!!!

1. Luke adds a simple but overwhelming word

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

2. DAILY!!! Christ never gives us the day off!! Neither will sin or the world in its hatred of the gospel!

V. The Paradox of Christ's Demand

Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

- A. The Life of Relentless Selfishness is Paradoxically the Most Miserable

1. People who fanatically pursue their own happiness in this world are often deeply empty and consistently angry
2. Like one driven person lamented

“I spent my whole life climbing the ladder of success, only to discover it was leaning against the wrong wall.”

Almost twenty years ago, Tom Brady, at that time the New England Patriots quarterback, in an interview with 60 minutes journalist Steve Kroft said these stunning words:

BRADY: A lot of times I think I get very frustrated and introverted, and there's times where I'm not the person that I want to be.

Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what is." I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think: ... it's gotta be more than this. I mean this can't be what it's all cracked up to be. I mean I've done it. I'm 27. And what else is there for me?

KROFT: What's the answer?

BRADY: I wish I knew. I wish I knew.

3. The Book of Ecclesiastes already knew this:

Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

B. More than this, eternal judgment follows a life of selfishness

1. We'll discuss this more next time... but this is what it means to lose your soul

Matthew 25:41 [Hearing these terrifying words from Christ on Judgment Day] "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

C. [BUT whoever loses it will find it] Finding your life

1. When you lose your life in this world, you find it eternally in Christ!
2. Christ is the Treasure Hidden in the Field! Christ is the Pearl of Great Price! Christ is life itself!
 - a. A rich life of peace in their conscience, knowing their sins are forgiven
 - b. A rich life of purpose in this world, serving others daily
 - c. A rich life of hope in the future, knowing they are storing up treasure for judgment day
 - d. A rich life of confidence in God, knowing that God will give them what they need to live and to serve Him
3. They have found life at last... their search is over!!
4. More on this next time

VI. Practical Applications

A. Initial Conversion

1. You cannot be saved if you don't understand ...Jesus demands it all
2. A true evangelist is not going to lie to you and tell you there's no cost to following Jesus
 - a. It isn't easy or free to follow Christ!!
 - b. Initial conversion is the first moment of dying to self
3. Nowadays: "Benefit evangelism": "Here's what you'll get: more satisfaction and meaning out of life, a new sense of purpose, strong sense of community, a hopeful attitude, more energy... and you'll be prepared for eternity to boot!"

B. Daily Obedience

1. Once you are converted, Christ begins to make demands on you at every moment

2. Demanding that you give everything for Him and for the gospel
3. He never ceases to be a King, and He never gives us a moment off from bearing His yoke upon us
4. Every moment of every day belongs to Him... and the essence of my daily walk is fighting the constant urge to rebel, to go off my own way, to please my own fleshly drives and do my own fleshly thing
5. From the first moment you open your eyes every day until you close them in sleep that night, there is not a moment of the day of which Christ does not say "Mine!!"

C. Warfare Against Sin

1. The essence of our struggle with sin is a struggle against the selfishness of our flesh
2. The struggle to DIE, to put SELF to DEATH is the core of our walk of sanctification
3. Every single day, every moment of the day, the indwelling Spirit leads us into mortal combat with the FLESH and its desires
4. You cannot make progress in holiness without dying to yourself

D. Prayer

1. Christ leads you to a daily Quiet Time
2. The alarm rings, you groan and your flesh just wants to sleep longer
3. But you know if you don't deny yourself, die to yourself at this moment, you won't get another clear time to pray in solitude the rest of the day
4. You kneel down, and go over your prayer list

E. Bible Reading

1. Similarly, you commit yourself to reading through the Bible in a year

2. Perhaps on a given day, you haven't been able to read that day's portion yet
3. You are tired, you've worked hard all day
4. Basically the choice comes down to this: read the Bible like you should, or go online or relax or do what you want until bedtime... you face your flesh one more time and have to put it to death

F. Church Life

1. Saturday morning, there's an outreach in the community... going door to door to invite people to the Health Fair this summer
2. You have tons to do around the house or in school or with your family
3. Or perhaps you have an opportunity to serve as a deacon or Bible for Life Teacher or by leading a women's Bible study or hosting a home fellowship or coming to a two-hour prayer meeting or serving on the HOST ministry as a greeter
4. Or perhaps it has to do with just regular church attendance... you'd rather not on some random Sunday... but the Lord is calling you

Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ

5. Or perhaps it has to do with confronting a sinning brother or sister... it will be a painful encounter but you know God is calling you to speak the truth in love to a person who needs to hear it most
6. Healthy church life is a life of constant commitment, sacrifice and daily taking up the cross and following Christ

G. Marriage

Husbands... called on to die for their bride like Christ did for His

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

YET Every single day **both** the husband and the wife have to learn self-denial... seeking your own joy in blessing your spouse

H. Parenting

1. The lessons in self-denial only really start taking off when God blesses the married couple with children
2. Some writer put it: “God shows you how selfish you are by sending you someone even more selfish than you are... a newborn!”
3. So it develops over years... sacrifices the parents make to raise their children in the fear and nurture of the Lord

I. Evangelism

1. You will never lead anyone to Christ without following Christ’s pattern: deny yourself, take up your cross and follow
2. Workplace: your co-worker is going through a hard time in his marriage; he’s unchurched, not a believer, and you’ve never spoken to him about Christ... the Lord lays him on your heart and you begin to pray for him; next thing you know he is standing in your office talking to you about his troubles... the Lord shows you **NOW IS THE TIME... SPEAK UP ABOUT CHRIST...** but immediately fear wells up in your heart, it feels like dying... and so it is;
3. Let me say it again: You will never lead anyone to Christ without following Christ’s pattern: deny yourself, take up your cross and follow

Friends, these are just a few of the countless ways the Lord will call on you to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow him.

But if you do, you will find your life in this world and eternally in the next!